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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied

Military-Scientific Matters

Some Lessons of the Initial Period of World War II,  
and Problems of Constant Combat Readiness of Troops in  
Modern Conditions

(Based on Materials of the Military-Scientific  
Conference of the Leningrad Military District Command)

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The conference of officers and generals of the district command was held according to the plan of military-scientific work, and its aim was to analyze the experience of the initial period of World War II, to explain its importance in the development of contemporary military art, and to arrive at pertinent conclusions for improving the combat readiness of troops.

The Commander of Troops of the District, General of the Army M.I. Kazakov, pointed out in his opening address that, in spite of the great changes in military science which have taken place as a result of the appearance of new and improved means of waging war, the experience and lessons of the initial period of the last war have not lost their significance. An analysis of the prewar combat readiness of troops and of their action during the first days of war can produce a number of useful conclusions for improving the combat readiness of troops in modern conditions. A feature of particular interest in the initial period of the last war is that during its course our troops had to carry out one of the most complicated tasks in warfare - the repulse of a surprise attack by superior enemy forces. The question of surprise attack and its frustration still remains a most important problem in modern conditions.

The initial period of World War II is also interesting because it was basically a period of mobile warfare. Soviet

troops employed such methods as meeting battles and engagements, counterthrusts, and mobile defense. Of special interest to us is the fact that it was precisely during this period that new types of armed forces and arms of troops were employed for the first time on a large scale, and the theoretical principles of their employment were put to the test. The practical significance of such conclusions lies in the fact that, in a future war, precisely in its initial stages, troops will also have to make practical use for the first time of new, but incomparably more complicated and powerful, types of weapons and combat equipment.

The main address at the conference was given by the Chief of Staff of the District, Lieutenant-General I. L. Tsarenko.

In this address, and ensuing discussions, the following questions were reflected.

#### Combat Readiness of Troops

The concept of combat readiness should not be narrowed and reduced to the capability of troops to react correctly to the signals of a superior commander. Experience teaches that the level of combat readiness depends on the level of development of operational skill and tactics.

As is known, before World War II we had worked out a theory of operations in depth. This, however, was based mainly on conditions under which the armed forces of the country were fully mobilized and deployed on the eve of war in accordance with previously laid plans. No rigid demarcation was made between combat operations during the initial period of war and subsequent stages. Military-theoretical thinking did not embrace all the special characteristics of waging war using large numbers of tanks, motorized infantry, aircraft, etc, and did not draw attention to the complexity and diversity in methods of operations inherent in the initial period of a war.

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The absence of any comprehensive thinking on the conduct of military operations during the initial period of a war led to a number of errors in the control of troops. This situation is of particularly great significance in modern conditions. Nowadays, everyone agrees that the next war, if the Anglo-American imperialists succeed in unleashing it, will not only begin differently, but will proceed along different lines than did the Second World War. With regard to methods of troop operations, especially during the initial period of the war, this question remains complex, and has not yet been fully resolved.

While, during the last few years, we have made definite strides in the area of the development of matters of operational skill, much less has been done in the field of tactics. Tactics continue to be mainly based on the experience of the Second World War.

Lessons of World War II teach us that the reorganization of troops on a large scale carries with it the danger of diminished combat readiness. Delays in the introduction of new T/O and in issuing corresponding equipment have a particularly adverse effect on combat readiness. Such delays often lead to a situation in which units and large units, simultaneously equipped with both old and new weapons, become difficult to control. Just such a situation as this occurred with us on the eve of World War II with respect to the air forces and the tank and mechanized troops. In border districts, a considerable number of large units had a heterogenous composition. During the course of combat operations, they proved difficult to employ, thereby further complicating the already difficult situation of our troops.

At the present time, as is known, our Army and Navy are going through a complicated period of rearmament. On the basis of known cases, it is evident that in both aims and scope, this period is qualitatively different from the similar period preceding World War II. For this reason, organizational diversity and the

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simultaneous possession by our troops of both modern and obsolete combat equipment may lead to even greater difficulty in controlling troops than during the last war. From this point of view, it is impossible to accept as correct the proportioned distribution of incoming equipment to the large units. Another principle should be followed: namely, that of completely equipping one large unit before starting on the next. In this process, those large units located near the national frontier should be equipped first, as their operational function requires them to remain in a state of constant combat readiness.

Some comrades (Major-General Samoylovich, Colonels Gayvoronskiy, Komissarov and others) pointed out that divisions at constant readiness must be completely equipped with combat equipment and materiel. The personnel of these divisions must be brought up to strength with men from available trained contingents. For this reason, it is advisable to have within the composition of the armed forces training troops and specialized training centers. As is known, the very first days of war showed that new equipment which the troops had could not be successfully utilized, because the personnel had not succeeded in mastering it. Major-General of Artillery Kritskiy emphasized that, in order to improve the combat readiness of missile troops, it is essential to carry out timely reconnoitering of the elements of combat formation of missile large units and units, and also to solve all problems connected with preparations for firing for effect at stationary targets. It is also advisable to prepare areas of deployment for front missile technical bases and routes for the supply of warheads to missile large units and units.

In modern conditions, no reliance can be placed on having a lengthy period of time in which to carry out a relatively undisturbed mobilization of all rear units and establishments and the necessary changeover of the organization and work of the front's rear. In connection with this, Major-General Ivanov suggested that in border

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military districts, basic rear units and establishments of an army and a front, at least in reduced form, should be maintained in peacetime. Some of these could be of the roadside depot (dorozhnoye depo) type, i.e., consisting of 2 or 3 officers engaged in mobilization work.

Major-General Yermakov, in his address, stressed in detail the necessity for radical improvement in mobilization preparations as one of the factors of combat readiness of the troops. In his opinion, there is still much left to be done in this sphere. In the majority of exercises, the most important problem for divisions under strength - mobilization buildup - is neither studied, nor made the subject of exercises.

Of no less importance during the initial period of a war is the organization of military transport. Colonel Filyukov stressed that on the basis of lessons learned during the initial period of the last war, particular attention should be paid to the further development of the communications network in border districts, particularly in the northwestern areas, by building new railroad lines and laying second tracks. It is essential to work out in more detail, and start even now to implement, the partial provision of rail routes by passing railroad junctions and other large artificial features.

Ways and Means of Conducting Combat Operations During  
the Initial Period of a War

It was stressed, both in the main address and in subsequent speeches, that the ways and means of conducting combat operations during the initial period of a war depend, in the first place, on the nature of the combat tasks being carried out by the troops at that time.

As has already been pointed out above, the armed forces of our country during the initial period of World War II

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were faced with the necessity of repulsing a surprise invasion by superior enemy forces. In order to carry out this essential task, it was most important to obtain timely information on enemy preparations for attack. For this reason, the ways and means of conducting combat operations during that period depended on the availability of intelligence information on the enemy, and on the state, and successful gathering, of intelligence. Most speakers drew attention to the fact that intelligence, in a number of military districts, before the start of military operations, was not brought to a state of readiness and, as a result, was unable to carry out to the full the tasks which faced it.

Under modern conditions, the role of intelligence collection is growing even greater. Now, both sides have tremendous stocks of nuclear weapons, the mass employment of which could have very serious consequences for troops subjected to a surprise attack. This can be avoided only by having well-organized and permanently functioning intelligence collection. Here intelligence collection is faced now with immeasurably more complicated tasks than during the period of World War II. In particular, with much larger areas now requiring coverage by intelligence, the requirements for accuracy in the information obtained by intelligence have increased still further.

The new volume and character of intelligence tasks call for new measures and methods of organizing and conducting it. It can no longer be based only on visual means - as was often the case during the period of the Second World War. It must now be given a technical foundation corresponding to the complexity and diversity of the tasks which it has to carry out.

A number of considerations for improving intelligence were presented by Major-General Ankudinov in his address. He stressed, in particular, that the time had now come when it was essential to have in border armies and corps suitable personnel and equipment for radio and radio-technical intelligence collection, since it would not be

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possible at the start of hostilities to detach personnel and equipment for these purposes from the front special purpose (osnaz--osboye naznacheniyе) units. In order to increase the combat readiness of special intelligence, even in peacetime, it is essential to build up and train a reserve of front intelligence groups. Special attention must be paid to equipping these groups thoroughly with technical-materiel and radio communications equipment.

Aerial reconnaissance plays an important role during the initial period of war. In conjunction with other means of intelligence collection, it is capable of carrying out quickly and over vast areas combat reconnaissance, and of pinpointing targets for our missile weapons. For this reason, a front operating under conditions of the northwestern theater of operations should have at least two reconnaissance aviation regiments, while an army should have a squadron of tactical reconnaissance aviation. The present forces and means of aerial reconnaissance in no way answer the requirements of fronts and armies for reconnaissance aviation.

Study of the problems of concentration and deployment of our troops on the eve of the enemy onslaught shows that the Command of the Leningrad and Baltic Military Districts had, in the main, correctly evaluated the probable axes of enemy attack. The choice of operational axes for covering the national frontier, on the whole, answered the requirements of the situation which arose. The main shortcoming in the deployment of troops of both districts lay in the fact that it was carried out only for the purpose of covering the national frontier. The troops of the districts were, in essence, not oriented toward the fulfilment of the active task of frustrating the surprise attack, which was being prepared by the enemy. In addition, the 7th Army of the Leningrad Military District, which was deploying on the Petrozavodsk axis, where the enemy was preparing his main strike, had only two battalions in reserve. The operational deployment of troops of the

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Baltic District on the eve of war was somewhat deeper, but the major part of the larger units located in depth had little mobility. As was shown by subsequent events, they were unable to unite their efforts with those of the divisions of the first line.

Both in the principal address and in subsequent speeches by members of the conference, it was noted in the process of reviewing the course of the conduct of military operations that there were marked deficiencies in the employment of, and cooperation between, the various types of armed forces and arms of troops. Numerous instances were quoted of the not always justified splitting up of mechanized and tank corps in order to strengthen infantry on threatened sectors of the front. Attention was drawn to the fact that the principle of massing mechanized and tank troops was in practice carried out with major errors, thereby resulting in a marked decrease in the force of their strikes. Mention was made of poor coordination in the combat operations of infantry, tanks and aviation. Lack of due coordination of operations frequently resulted in a situation in which the partial success achieved by tanks or infantry was not consolidated by the action of other arms of troops, and liquidation by the enemy was relatively easy.

In present conditions, the question of correct employment and close cooperation among the different types of armed forces and arms of troops taking part in an action is even more important than during the last war. While poor coordination in employing weapons during the initial period of World War II lowered the resistance capabilities of our troops, in modern conditions it could entail much more serious consequences.

The examination of the course of military operations also showed up another shortcoming in the use by our troops of the types and means of armed combat - a lack of a flexible blending of them in relation to the characteristics of the situation at the moment.

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This affected our capacity to economize in men and equipment on some sectors in order to deliver decisive blows on other sectors. This was one of the reasons why our troops were unable, for quite a long time, to create firm resistance in the path of the German Fascist troops.

In view of the limited number of troops which will be at the disposal of the front in the first operation of the initial period of a future war, only the well-thought-out coordination of the various ways and means of conducting combat operations can bring success.

#### Control of Troops

In the principal address, Lieutenant-General Tsarenko frequently stressed the thought that if the methods and style of directing troops, reliability of communications, and timely delivery of orders from superior commanders to those required to carry out the orders, had a tremendous influence on the course of events in the initial period of the last war, then control of troops in the operations of a nuclear war assumes even greater importance. Subsequent speakers, Colonel Gayvoronskiy, General Kritskiy and Lieutenant-Colonel Korobkin agreed with this, and pointed out in particular that up to now the problem of equipping control points has not been solved. A front does not, in fact, have organic resources for moving them. With regard to communications, their reliability depends not only on performance characteristics of the means of communications, but, to a great extent, on skill in operating them. During the initial period of the last war, certain commanders often regarded the loss of telephone communications as the loss of all communications because, since they were unable to use confidently the radio equipment in their possession, they managed poorly the processes of secure control of troops. Unfortunately, such facts are not completely out of date.

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The problem of mastering new methods of control is especially important at the present time, as active steps are being taken to bring into normal daily use automatic means of directing troops.

The commander of the Troops of the Military District, General of the Army M.I. Kazakov, in his concluding speech, summed up the results of the conference, and stressed that, at the present time, the circumstances of war require troops to be brought to full combat readiness in extremely short periods, which, in the case of individual large units, will be counted, not in hours, but in minutes.

In the interest of raising the combat readiness of our troops further, noted the leader of the conference, we must pay particular attention first of all to missile troops and troops of the PVO (antiair defense), and completely master the new means of combat. Unfortunately, it is precisely in this field that we frequently come across major shortcomings.

For instance, it hardly seems right that at a number of PVO and radio-reconnaissance posts we have on duty junior officers and interpreters. Their training level is such that they simply are not capable of evaluating properly the complex situation which may occur in the air. These responsible duties should be carried out by highly qualified and experienced officers.

Dealing with the problem of deployment and concentration of troops before the start of military operations, General of the Army Kazakov put forward the thesis that a future war would start, first of all, with the carrying out of missile operations, not with operations involving ground troops. For this reason, it can be expected that the concentration and deployment of ground troop groupings in the immediate vicinity of the frontier on such a large scale as formerly is now most

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unlikely to take place. The concentration and deployment of troops before the initiation of combat operations will involve first of all moving them from their permanent locations, bringing them up to the axes along which it is intended to carry out combat operations, and assuming operational formation without creating clearly defined, compact groupings. Although conditions of concentration and deployment in modern conditions have changed radically, the experience of the last war in this context has not lost its significance. A useful lesson which is worth remembering is that the deployment of troops must be carried out with regard for their ability to maneuver, and in such a way that reserves located in the depth can, at the appropriate time, add their combat effort to that of the troops fighting up front. Otherwise, the deployment of troops two or three words missing of effort, which happened, in particular, in the Baltic Military District during the first days of the war.

One of the weaknesses in the control of troops is that the headquarters of border districts, both in the staffing and in the character of their functions, still remain the headquarters of the ground troops of the district. Meanwhile, the front as an operational and strategic formation includes in its composition, besides the ground troops, the air forces and troops of the PVO. If the front is located on a maritime axis, it may also have naval forces subordinated to it. Our district headquarters are not yet suitably prepared for the control of troops of a front of such complex composition. We are, therefore, obliged to approach more seriously the examination of the structure and composition of the headquarters of border districts, and to broaden and hasten the retraining of generals and staff officers in order to raise the headquarters to the standard of the new tasks of controlling troops.

In conclusion, the leader of the conference expressed a wish for bolder introduction into practical

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troop control of automation elements which have  
already been technically developed and experimentally  
tested.

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